

Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism

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Where did allegorical interpretation come from?

- Allegorical interpretation of the Bible (rather than literal interpretation) and its resulting doctrines of amillennialism and postmillennialism came from the combination of three influences on the early church:

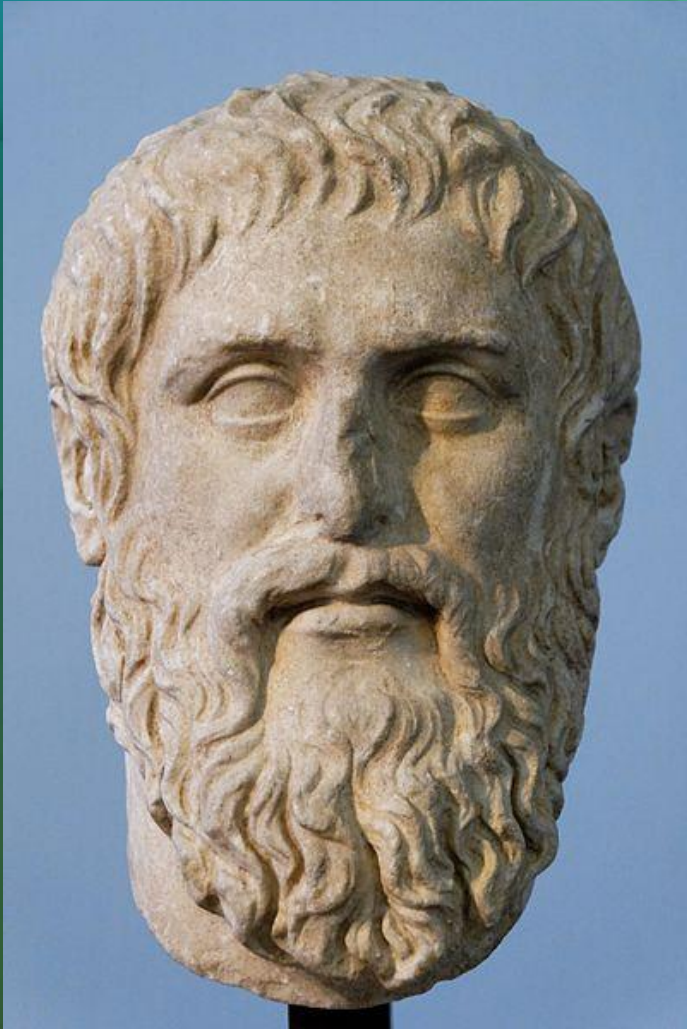
Greek Philosophy

+ Roman Politics

+ Anti-Semitism =

Allegorical Interpretation
Amillennialism
Postmillennialism

Plato, 423-347 BC

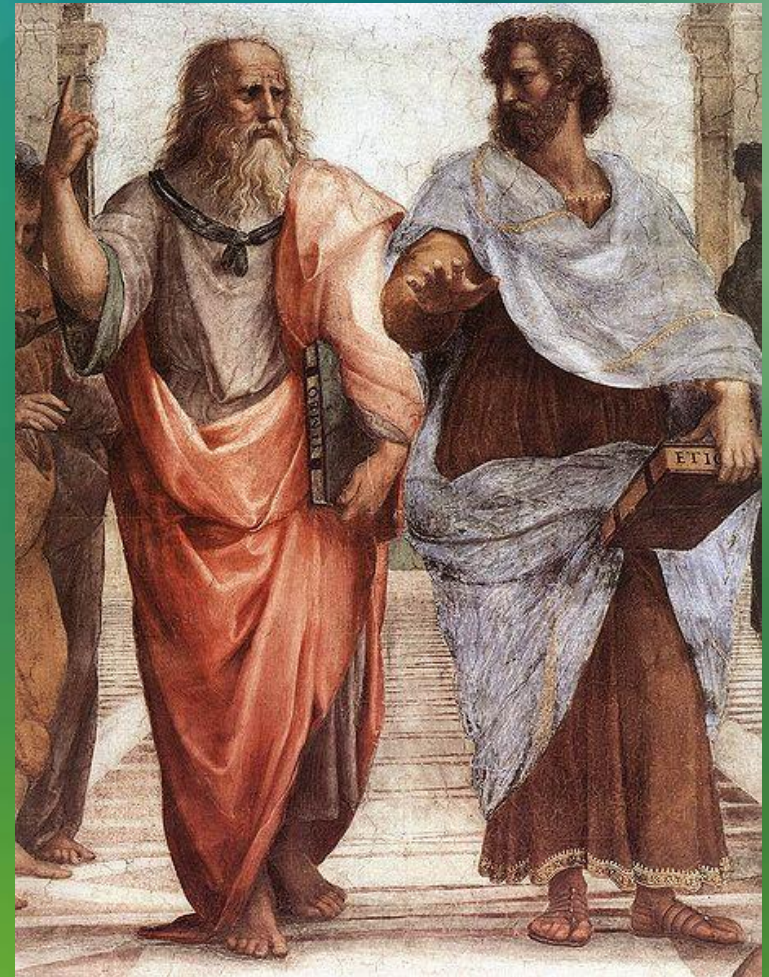


- Student of Socrates, teacher of Aristotle, founder of the Academy in Athens
- Believed that the One created the Forms, which in turn gave rise to the material world we comprehend through our senses. His emphasis was on the importance of transcending the material to know the Forms.
- In *Republic*, Plato advocates for aristocracy —rule by the philosophically enlightened, the ‘philosopher-king’, who has ‘climbed out of the cave’ of material senses and seen reality.
- Plato’s philosophy became the underpinning for Hellenism and later, Gnosticism.



Aristotle, 384-322 BC

- Student of Plato, teacher of Alexander the Great
- Philosopher of ancient physics, metaphysics, zoology, biology, ethics, government, linguistics, music, theater, poetry, rhetoric
- Systematized the science of logic
- Sought to understand the Universal through study of the Particulars (opposite approach from Plato)



Alexander the Great, 356-323 BC

- Macedonian king who conquered:

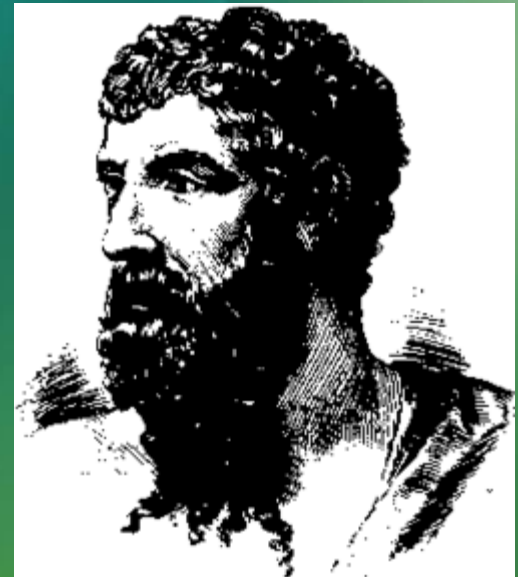
- Greece
- Palestine
- Egypt
- Persia



- Entered Afghanistan, Pakistan, India before troops threatened mutiny, and then turned back.
- Brought diffusion of Greek cultures (Hellenism) to the Mediterranean, Near East, and North Africa.

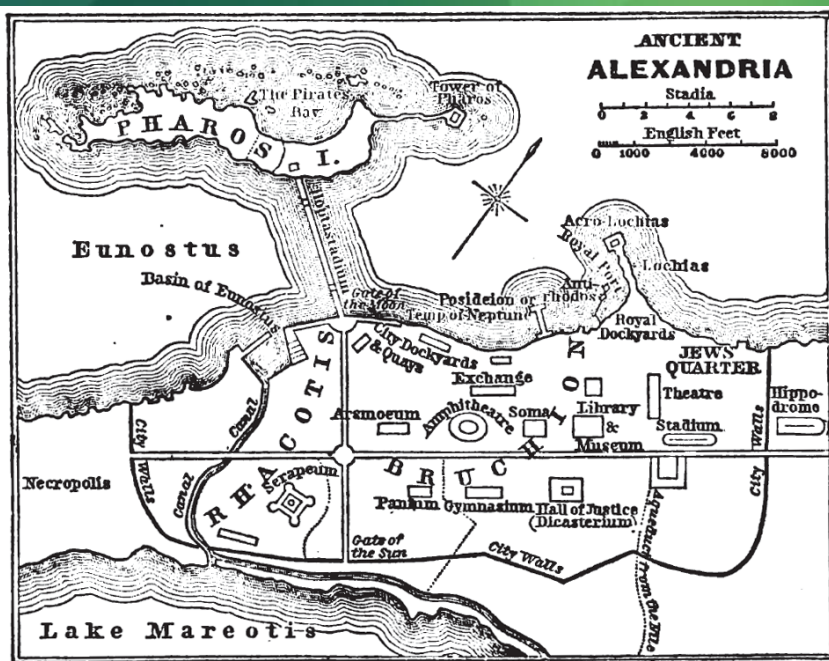
Aristobulus of Paneas

- Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, c. 160 BC, who lived in Alexandria, Egypt
- Peripatetic School (i.e., Aristotle's disciples)
- Also used Platonic and Pythagorean philosophy
- Derived two key doctrines:
 - Greek philosophy emanated from the OT
 - All the thought of Greek philosophers, esp. Aristotle, are to be found in Moses and the Prophets *by those who use the right method of inquiry.*
- Quoted by Clement and Eusebius; original works lost
- One of many contemporary Jewish philosophers who argued along these lines



The Catechetical School of Alexandria

- Founded by Alexander the Great on the site of the Egyptian city of Rhakotis ('that which is built up'); expanded by Cleomenes (Alexander's viceroy) and later by the Ptolemies.
- Home to the famous Lighthouse, the Library, and the Catacombs of Kom el Shoqafa.
- Had the largest Jewish community in the world; also a major center of Hellenism.
- The Septuagint was composed there.
- Greek, Jewish, and Egyptian populations kept separate until 3rd century BC, when ethnic conflict rose.



- Came under formal Roman rule in 80 BC; besieged by the Ptolemies during the Roman civil wars; captured by Octavian on 1 August, 30 BC, which is why he changed his name to Augustus.
- Once home to Hellenistic Jewish philosophy, the city hosted early Church Fathers (esp. Clement, Origen), who followed the Jews' lead in allegorical/spiritual interpretation of the Bible.
- The Catechetical School of Alexandria



Philo of Alexandria



Philo of Alexandria (20 BC – 50 AD) was a Jewish philosopher who sought to marry Hellenistic philosophy with Judaism by using the allegorical approach to biblical interpretation. His principal concern was to defend the Jews of Alexandria from the Greeks who persecuted them and he sought the acquiescence of Gaius Caligula. He founded a school of thought that championed *the allegorical sense of any passage as more important and profound than the literal interpretation.*

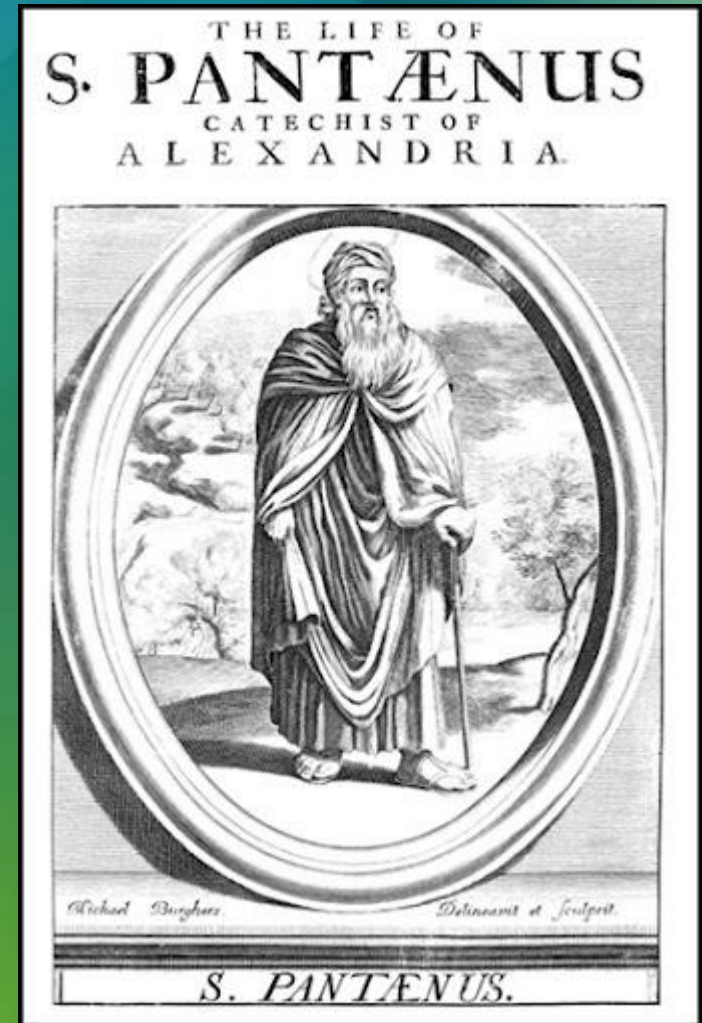
- Judaism is consistent and congruent with Greek Philosophy; therefore Rome should not tolerate persecution of Jews who are monotheistic.
- **The literal interpretation of the Tanakh, especially the prophecies, should be subordinated to the allegorical, spiritual interpretation, which in turn is similar to Hellenistic thinking.**
- Only the “initiated” (μύσται) can perceive the allegorical truth.
- God did not create *ex nihilo*, because matter is evil; therefore, He formed what was already there.



Pantaenus

“The Sicilian Bee”

- Christian theologian and perhaps head of the Catechetical School of Alexandria, c. 180 AD
- Stoic philosopher who converted to Christianity and tried to reconcile the two beliefs
- Served as a missionary and took the gospel to India
- Supported Serapion of Antioch, who fought against Gnosticism



Numenius of Apamea

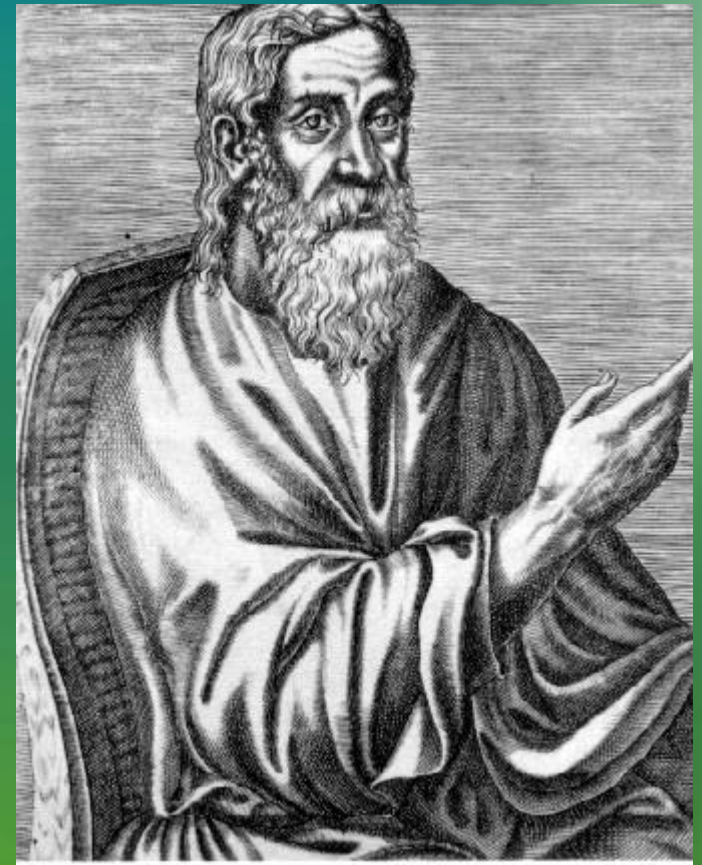


- Greek philosopher who lived in 2nd century AD Syria
- Neopythagorean
- Goal was to trace thought of Plato through Pythagoras and show its similarity to Brahmanism, Judaism, Magi, and Egyptian thought
- “What is Plato but Moses speaking Attic Greek?”
- Quoted by Origen, Eusebius, Theodoret



Clement of Alexandria

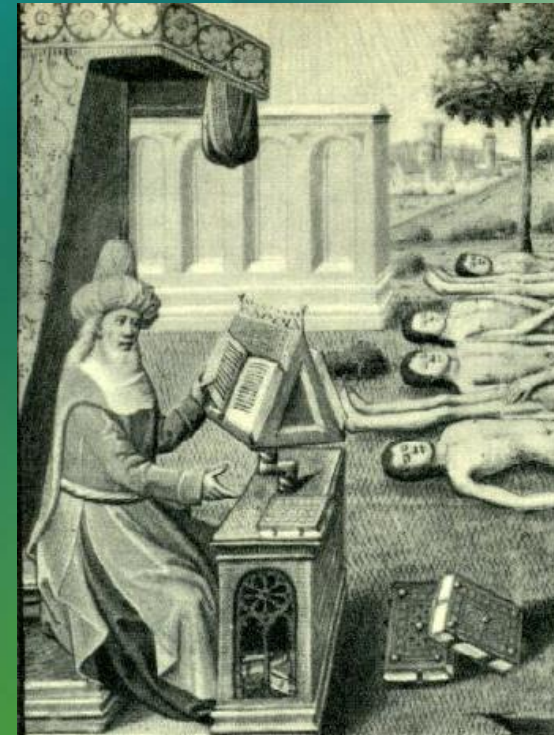
- Christian theologian (150-215 AD) who lived taught in the Catechetical School of Alexandria
- Perhaps succeeded Pantaenus as the head of the School and was followed by Origen
- Heavily influenced by Plato and the Stoics, pre-Christian esotericism, mystery religions, Greek mythology, and Gnosticism
- Disciples included Origen and Alexander of Jerusalem
- A “Church Father” recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, but later discredited by Pope Sixtus V over matters of doctrine
- Major works:
 - the Protrepticus (Exhortation) – written c. 195
 - the Paedagogus (Tutor) – written c. 198
 - the Stromata (Miscellanies) – written c. 198 – c. 203



Origen

184-254 AD

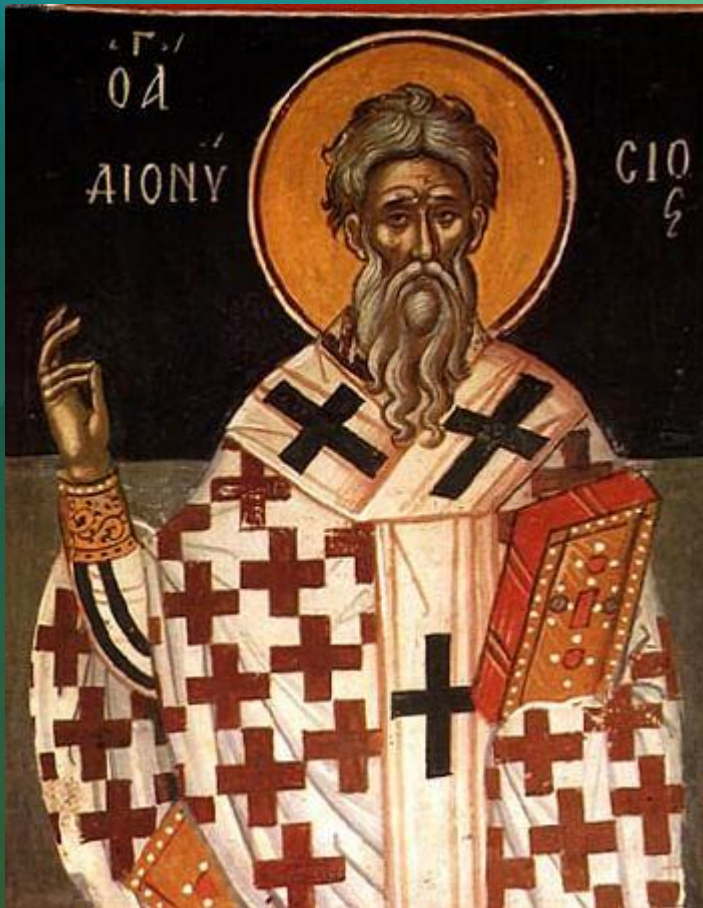
- Influenced from an early age by Gnosticism, and later by Philo and Clement, and neo-Platonism.
- Early influential theologian and writer later rejected by the Roman Catholic Church, in part because he believed in the pre-existence of souls.
- Believed that all beings, including Satan, would eventually be reconciled with God, and that Christ is subordinate to God.
- Wrote about 6000 works. His exegetical work was aimed at promoting "spiritual/allegorical" interpretation of the Bible.
 - In his *Treatise on First Principles*, recommends that the Old and New Testaments be interpreted allegorically at three levels, the first being the "flesh," the second the "soul," and the third the "spirit."
 - He believed that some events and laws in the Bible were impossible to believe unless interpreted allegorically.
- Believed that only the spiritual, non-material was real and important. This had obvious ramifications for eschatology.
- Origen considered premillennialists as crude because they placed their hopes in a material, physical reign of Christ.
- Strictly ascetic, he allegedly castrated himself. Tortured by Roman Emperor Decius and later died of his injuries.



An excerpt from Origen

- "Could any man of sound judgment suppose that the first, second and third days (of creation) had an evening and a morning, when there were as yet no sun or moon or stars? Could anyone be so unintelligent as to think that God made a paradise somewhere in the east and planted it with trees, like a farmer, or that in that paradise he put a tree of life, a tree you could see and know with your senses, a tree you could derive life from by eating its fruit with the teeth in your head? When the Bible says that God used to walk in paradise in the evening or that Adam hid behind a tree, **no one, I think, will question that these are only fictions, stories of things that never actually happened, and that figuratively they refer to certain mysteries.**"
- "Those who live according to the dictates of the knowledge of the Spirit, and are capable not only of governing themselves, but of instructing others, because they are few in number, are typified by the small number of those saved with Noah, as Jesus Christ, the true Noah, has few who are close to him in relation and intimacy to share in his word and understand wisdom.

Dionysius of Alexandria



- 3rd century Christian leader and theologian who served as Pope of Alexandria from 248-265 AD
- Studied under Origen and Heraclas, succeeding the latter as head of the Catechetical School in 231
- Contemporary of Christian historian Eusebius

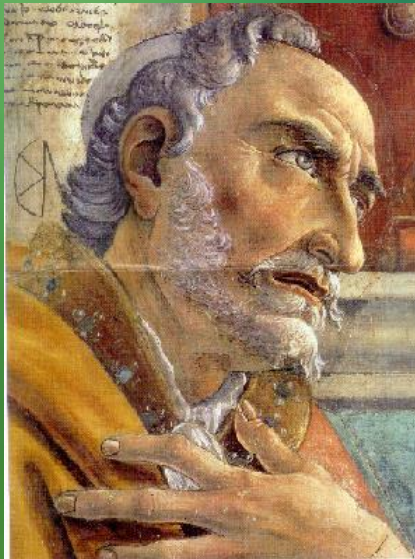


Where did Postmillennialism and Amillennialism come from?

Greek Philosophy

Roman Politics

- 354-430 AD
- Bishop of Hippo Regius in Roman Africa
- Influenced by Manichaeism and Neo-Platonism
- One of the most influential theologians for Roman Catholicism, Calvinism, and Lutheranism.
- Originally premillennial, Augustine came to view a literal earthly kingdom as “carnal” and so went on to propose an amillennial viewpoint.

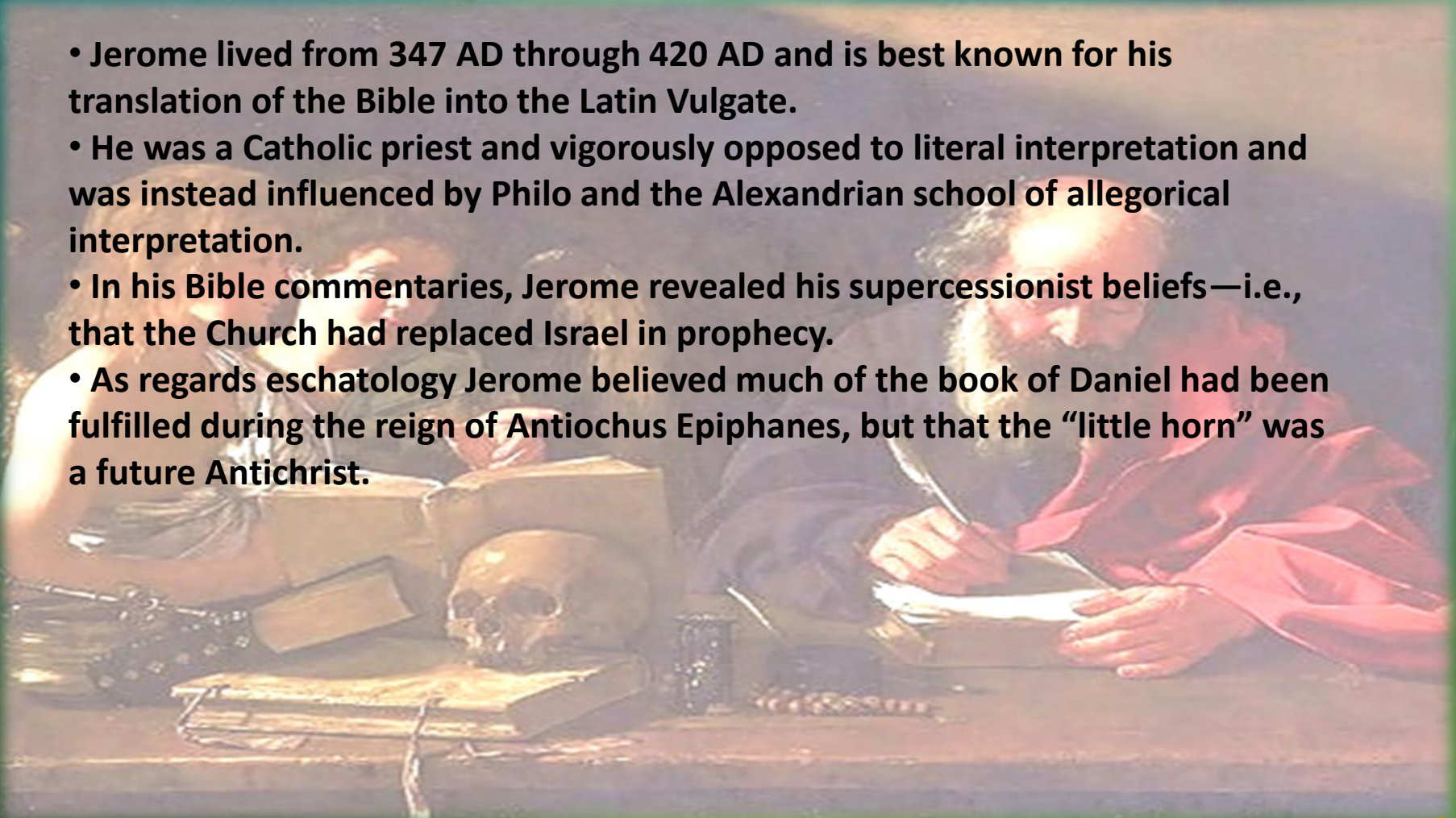


Augustine of Hippo

- The amillennial position uses the allegorical method of interpretation to suggest that all prophecies about Christ’s return to rule on the earth are in fact referring to a spiritual reality of the Church (i.e., the Body of Christ) ruling on earth.
- The “thousand years” of Revelation are symbolic of the Church Age. Hence, the millennial kingdom has already begun.
 - The “City of God” will overturn earthly kingdoms, replacing them with God’s Kingdom.
- Christ will physically return to conduct the final judgment of mankind.

Jerome and the Latin Vulgate

- Jerome lived from 347 AD through 420 AD and is best known for his translation of the Bible into the Latin Vulgate.
- He was a Catholic priest and vigorously opposed to literal interpretation and was instead influenced by Philo and the Alexandrian school of allegorical interpretation.
- In his Bible commentaries, Jerome revealed his supercessionist beliefs—i.e., that the Church had replaced Israel in prophecy.
- As regards eschatology Jerome believed much of the book of Daniel had been fulfilled during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, but that the “little horn” was a future Antichrist.



What is allegory? What is literal?



● Literal

- By this term we mean the plain, obvious, direct meaning of a passage.
- Literal interpretation includes the richness of the Scripture's symbolism, parables, typology, tropology, synecdoche, and occasional allegory.
- But it does not allow altering the plain meaning of a passage.

Examples of Allegorical Interpretation

- Noah's Ark was an allegory of Mary, because she carried the Word of God.
- The burning bush was an allegory of Mary, because she carried the Word of God and was not burned.
- Ezekiel 44:1-2
- The unclean animals, the hare and the pig, refer allegorically to Greece and Rome. [Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai's (ca. A.D 70)]
- Song of Songs
- What about Paul's use: 1 Cor. 9:10 (cf. Dt. 25:4); Galatians 4:24 (cf. Gen. 21:10)?

Examples of Allegorical Interpretation

- The “New Jerusalem” of Revelation 21:2 is actually an allegory for the glory of the eternal state.
- The journey of Abram from Ur to Haran represents the Stoic philosopher’s journey from sensual understanding to a deeper understanding of the spiritual.
- Luke 10:35—The two denarii that the Samaritan gave to the innkeeper represents baptism and the Lord’s supper.
- The reference to the River Euphrates in Genesis 2:14 refers to the outflow of manners.
- Pope Gregory: Job’s three friends represent heretics; his seven sons are the twelve apostles; his seven thousand sheep represent the faithful church; his three thousand hump-backed camels represent depraved Gentiles.

Antioch vs. Alexandria

- “At Antioch, the object was to find in Holy Writ its most obvious meaning; at Caesarea or Alexandria the search was for the figures of Christ. The one site accused allegory of destroying the value of the Bible as a record of the past, of travestyng it into mythological fable; the other dubbed ‘carnal’ all who clung to the letter.” (J. Quasten)
- For Origen discovers types not just in certain episodes, but in every detail of the inspired word. Each line is filled with mystery. On the other hand, Antioch made it a fundamental principle to see figures of Christ just occasionally, not always, in the Old Testament. Where the resemblance was marked and the analogy clear, only there would it admit a foreshadowing of the Savior. Types were the exception, not the rule; the Incarnation was everywhere prepared, but not everywhere prefigured.



You're
too
carnal!



You
distort
Scripture!



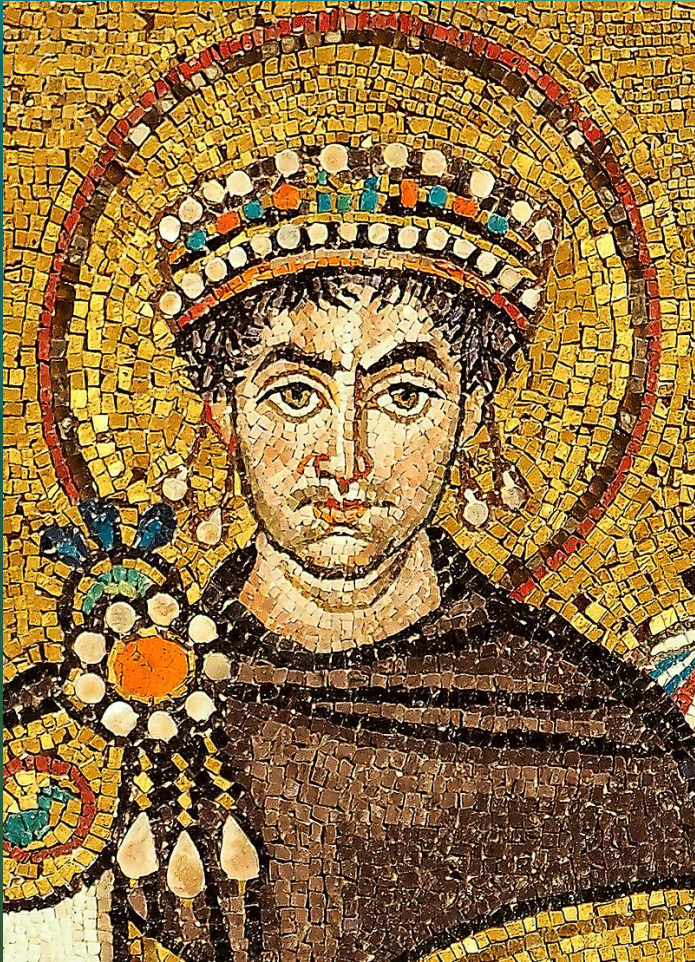
The 4th Century Paradigm Shift

- In 312 AD, Constantine placed the symbols χ and ρ on his shields prior to the Battle of Milvian Bridge.
- He enacted a policy of religious toleration and legalized Christianity.
- Praised by Eusebius, he became the first “Christian” emperor of Rome.
- Within a single generation, Christian bishops who bore the scars of torture were elevated into positions of power.



Constantine

Theodosius, 347-395 AD



“It is Our Will that all the peoples we rule shall practise that religion which the divine Peter the Apostle transmitted to the Romans. We shall believe in the single Deity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, under the concept of equal majesty and of the Holy Trinity. We command that those persons who follow this rule shall embrace the name of Catholic Christians. The rest, however, whom We adjudge demented and insane, shall sustain the infamy of heretical dogmas...and they shall be smitten first by divine vengeance and secondly by the retribution of Our own initiative, which We shall assure in accordance with divine judgment.”

Consequences of Roman patronage

- Emperors dictated religious doctrine and politicized Christianity.
- Ecclesiastical officials became corrupt.
- Eschatology changed to favor Rome as God's instrument.
- Allegorical interpretation required to sustain this idea.
- Christianity and Rome deepened their antipathy against Jews.

Anti-Semitism

- Roots are found in the Gospels and book of Acts as the Jewish authorities reject Christianity.
- Synagogues expel Christians as the faith spreads across Europe, Asia, and Africa.
- Jews rebel against Rome three times
 - 66-73 AD—First Jewish-Roman War; Temple destroyed
 - 115-117 AD—Kitos War
 - 132-135 AD—Bar Kokhba Revolt
- The Church's political alliance with Rome mandated hardening attitude against Jews.
- Hence, Scriptures predicting a future Kingdom of Israel must refer to the Church as the “New Israel”.